

CHAPTER TWO

Linguistic Hybridity

To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture.

Frantz Fanon¹

Postcolonial readings of William Shakespeare's play, *The Tempest*, constitute a common component of English literary studies in most universities these days. The idea of the colonized subject, personified by Caliban in this play, mastering the language of the colonizer, Prospero, and attempting to wield it as a tool to undermine and subvert the latter's authority is an important first step toward not just a dismantling of the colonizer's structure of hegemony but also the negotiation and creation of a new power dynamics between the colonizer and the colonized. To this end, language plays a vital role as an empowering tool of expression and assertion for the subject.

As Frantz Fanon points out in *Black Skin, White Masks*, language and cultural identity are inextricable – the former articulates the latter:

To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but this means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization [...]

[...] The Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter – that is, he will come closer to being a real human being – in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language. I am not unaware that this is one of man's attitudes face to face with Being. A man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language. What we are getting at becomes plain: Mastery of language affords remarkable power. (17-18)

The Negro's adoption of the metropolitan language, he argues, also means an acceptance and internalization of the colonizer's social and political thinking. "To speak a language

is to take on a world, a culture. The Antilles Negro who wants to be white will be the whiter as he gains mastery of the cultural tool that language is" (Fanon 38). This implies that language can be and has been in conspiracy with imperialism – the metropolitan language is inscribed with the colonizer's assumption of power and superiority over its subjects. However, Fanon, in his anti-colonial writings, does not declare an outright rejection of the metropolitan language altogether. He chose to write in French and employed it proficiently to examine and address the black syndrome of yearning to be white. In my opinion, his subversive position underscores the idea that the master's language may be appropriated by the colonized subject as a tool of anti-colonial resistance and empowerment. His phrase, "to take on" the metropolitan language and culture, suggests a confrontation and contestation with the colonial discourse underlying this adopted language and culture (Fanon 17). Empowerment for the postcolonial individual is derived from this very process of taking on colonialism's tools of enunciation and inscribing on them the subject's anti-colonial position.

In *The Pleasures of Exile*, West Indian writer George Lamming discusses the colonized subject's struggle with what he refers to as the "myth" that England is the supreme authority of literary "taste and judgement" (26). He admits to having subscribed to this standard at one time. As a young writer, he believed he had to go to England in order to be a writer. He recalls how he was most concerned that his first book, *In the Castle of My Skin*, received substantial reputation in England above anywhere else. While he was pleased to learn that an American publisher bought the book, and that the famous black American novelist Richard Wright was asked to write an introduction to it, Lamming acknowledges that the joy then was only secondary. More important to him was that the English literati in Britain recognized his work. Having dealt with that hang-up, Lamming goes on to argue that the language that the colonial master has taught his subjects is no longer exclusive to the former alone. This

language has become the domain of the colonized as well: "It is Caliban's as well; and since there is no absolute from which a moral prescription may come, Caliban is at liberty to choose the meaning of this moment" (Lamming 158).

Postcolonial writing deliberately problematizes the use and function of language, as a way of renouncing the hegemony of the metropolitan language and as an exercise of empowerment by appropriating this language and inscribing on it a different meaning. The process of de-colonization entails that colonized and postcolonial subjects play an active role in shaping the new language, or be "at liberty to choose the meaning of this moment" (Lamming 158). As Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin explain in *The Empire Writes Back*: "The crucial function of language as a medium of power demands that post-colonial writing define itself by seizing the language of the centre and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place" (38). The first step therefore is the "abrogation" or rejection of the privileged position assumed by the metropolitan language, followed by the "appropriation" of this language to articulate the postcolonial voice (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989: 38). The postcolonial writer makes a conscious and open stand that he or she no longer recognizes the privilege or hegemony assumed and imposed by an imperial power. However, the abrogation of the latter's political domination does not necessarily entail a complete rejection and abandonment of its tools and systems of knowledge and expression. Some writers have maintained that a complete rejection of the colonial language is the only way to dismantle the effects of imperial domination – the most prominent proponent of this is perhaps Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o who has chosen to renounce English to write in his native language, Gikuyu.² At the same time, there is also a significantly large number of postcolonial writers who have chosen to retain the metropolitan language but appropriate it for their own purposes.

In this chapter, I shall discuss the significance of this process of abrogation and appropriation which contributes toward the creation of a hybrid language in two plays by Wole Soyinka: *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963)³ and *The Road* (1965). Though written in the English language, the plays articulate different versions of the language. There is a clear contrast and contestation between the English of the colonizer and that of the colonized subject, each carrying, in Fanon's word, the "weight" of its European or African civilization respectively (Fanon 17). While the first play employs little Nigerian dialect but focuses more on African idioms expressed in the English language, the second play is replete with the local vernacular, presenting a sharp contrast between 'correct' and pidgin English. The selection of these two plays aims to demonstrate how the interaction between the different 'Englishes' in the text produces a new voice, a hybrid English. The plays therefore, as writings in a language that is English but not quite the same as the metropolitan version, may be seen as a metonymic expression of new cultural identities emerging from the colonial experience.

The use of a new English, de-centered and de-colonized, and appropriated by writers whose mother tongue is a different language, is a common feature among postcolonial writers. The Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe, in his speech, "The African Writer and the English Language," maintains that one need not be guilt-ridden for choosing to write in the adopted language. "I have been given the language and I intend to use it," he asserts (285). His idea of using the language is in appropriating it to fulfill his role as an African writer who, he argues, has a responsibility to assist in the de-colonization of his nation.⁴ As Achebe points out: "I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit new African surroundings" (286). Gabriel Okara shares the same view:

Some may regard this way of writing English as a desecration of the language. This of course is not true. Living languages grow like living things, and English is far from a dead language. There are American, West Indian, Australian, Canadian and New Zealand versions of English. All of them add life and vigour to the language while reflecting their own respective cultures. Why shouldn't there be a Nigerian or West African English which we can use to express our own ideas, thinking and philosophy in our own way? (286-7)

Both Achebe and Okara are asserting the legitimacy of a language that, in their opinion, can convey their African cultural experience more adequately compared to metropolitan English. Their contention is that while their hybrid language may be derived from an adopted language, this does not deny them the right to use the latter on their own terms. In so doing, they inscribe into the adopted language a new meaning that overrides, or "overwrites", the colonial authority of the metropolitan language. The new hybrid language then becomes a more effective tool with which to express and address local concerns. As Lamming argues, such a gesture of establishing, in his context, West Indian English as a legitimate language, is part of the process of the larger goal of employing the new, hybrid English to address postcolonial West Indian society.

I am not interested in what the West Indian writer has brought to the English language; for English is no longer the exclusive language of the men who live in England. That stopped a long time ago; and it is today, among other things, a West Indian language. What the West Indians do with it is their own business. A more important consideration is what the West Indian novelist has brought to the West Indies. That is the real question; and its answer can be the beginning of an attempt to grapple with that colonial structure of awareness which has determined West Indian values. (Lamming 36)

By writing about West Indian society, and thus pointing out or addressing the intrinsic and debilitating colonial attitude it harbors, Lamming is engaged in the process of deconstructing, and redefining, the West Indian "way of seeing" (26). A similar approach may be seen in Soyinka's works, most of which address the concerns of Nigerian society and the way it deals with colonial experience, modernism, tradition and power. And Soyinka, like Lamming and Achebe, chooses to articulate his critique in a new, hybrid English rather than reject the legacy of the colonial language altogether.

This stand differs from that of Kenyan writer, Ngugi, who has chosen to stop writing in the language of the colonizer – English – and to return to his native tongue, Gikuyu. The colonized subject who continues to write in the colonizer's language may work to de-colonize the language, but Ngugi, in his essay, "The Language of African Literature", argues that the effort will only be a partial success so long as the postcolonial writers are still working with the colonizer's language or tools of the dominant discourse. "In my view," he argues, "language was the most important vehicle through which that [colonial] power fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation" (287). Writers who write in the colonizer's language would end up enriching it but are doing little for their own native tongues. This position, Ngugi contends, continues to place the focus on the colonizer and his language.

Why, we may ask, should an African writer, or any writer, become so obsessed by taking from his mother tongue to enrich other tongues? Why should he see it as his particular mission. We never ask ourselves: how can we enrich our languages? How can we 'prey' on the rich humanist and democratic heritage in the struggles for other peoples in other times and other places to enrich our own? (Ngugi 285)

Ngugi maintains that language and cultural identity are inseparable, and that his decision to write in the Kenyan language of Gikuyu "is part and parcel of the anti-imperialist struggles of the Kenyan and African peoples," by restoring legitimacy and authority to a language that has through colonialism been associated with "negative qualities of backwardness, underdevelopment, humiliation and punishment" (290).

Soyinka, however, like Achebe and Okara, takes the same position as Fanon in the language dilemma, rejecting Ngugi's stand as exclusionary. Soyinka also refuses to shut out foreign cultures. On the contrary, he has openly espoused the appreciation and adoption, where applicable, of ideas from across the globe. As James Gibbs notes in *Modern Dramatists: Wole Soyinka*:

At Stratford-on-Avon during 1983, Soyinka acknowledged that he had been influenced by everything he had read. [...] this alerts us to regard Soyinka as self-consciously working in a literary tradition. He is a writer who is convinced of the validity of re-employing existing material. Like European playwrights from Sophocles to Shakespeare to Brecht, he regards eclecticism as a right, maintaining that it is what an artist does with borrowed material that is important; what or how much he takes is not significant. (28)

Nigerian writers such as Soyinka and Achebe, who also write in their native tongues (Yoruba and Igbo respectively) have no reservations about writing in English. Their writings in the latter, however, attempt to break away from metropolitan English by deliberately inserting into the adopted language their African cultural experience. The introduction of different or more African-flavored ways of expression into the text written in English is both a political statement as well as an attempt to articulate a particular thought-structure or emotion that could not be adequately or successfully conveyed by the metropolitan language. This concern with the capacity of the language

as a tool of expression is shared by other postcolonial writers. As Indian author Raja Rao contends in the "Author's Foreword" to his novel *Kanthapura*:

One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word 'alien,' yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up [...] but not our emotional make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. (296)

Rao brings up a very important point here: that is, the postcolonial writer *cannot* choose just one language and expect that to be adequate in addressing the complexity inherent in his or her cultural identity that comes about as a result of the colonial experience. I stress the word *cannot* because the colonial experience is irreversible and this encounter has left an indelible effect on postcolonial society. The postcolonial individual then inherits both the mother tongue and the metropolitan language, both of which could be appropriated to express the interaction between the discourses represented by the two languages or voices. It is through this dialogic process that the hybrid English is negotiated, and Rao's new English would differ from Soyinka's because of their different cultural backgrounds and colonial experiences.

Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of 'hybrid construction' discussed in *The Dialogic Imagination* is imperative to my understanding of the hybrid nature of postcolonial writing. The thrust of his book is his view on 'dialogism', which argues that language is far from "monological" and examines the intrinsic multiplicity and ideological diversity within a language system (104-10). Bakhtin's essay, "Discourse in the Novel", analyzes the interaction between different voices within a language, and between languages. He

argues that language is a site of contestation, not in the structuralist mode of binary opposition, but for the different levels of socio-ideological stratification inherent in the text (xviii-xix). According to Bakhtin, there is "a multiplicity of social voices" engaged in a "wide variety" of dialogic interactions in the novel (263). These voices are inserted through the "authorial speech", "narrator speech", "character speech" and "inserted genres" (Bakhtin 263). The result is what he calls a "hybrid construction":

What we are calling a hybrid construction is an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two "languages," two semantic and axiological belief systems. We repeat, there is no formal – compositional and syntactic – boundary between these utterances, styles, languages, belief systems; the division of voices and languages takes place within the limits of a single syntactic whole, often within the limits of a simple sentence. It frequently happens that even one and the same word will belong simultaneously to two languages, two belief systems that intersect in a hybrid construction – and, consequently, the word has two contradictory meanings, two accents [...]. (304-5)

Bakhtin goes on to explain that "the boundaries [between the different voices] are deliberately flexible and ambiguous" (308). Though the insertion of varied voices could be intentional and otherwise, he is more interested in the former. "Intentional, artistically oriented hybridization" does not merge the multiple voices or views within the sentence but "[sets them] against each other dialogically" – "the illumination of one language by means of another, the carving-out of a living image of another language" (Bakhtin 360-1). He sees "unintentional, unconscious hybridization" as the mixing and merging of "linguistic world views," the process of which is "mute and opaque," but remains none the less "profoundly productive historically" (Bakhtin 360).

Robert Young, in *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, observes that Bakhtin's idea has gained much currency in the field of cultural studies, where it has been developed to explore the cultural dialogics at play in society:

Bakhtin's doubled form of hybridity therefore offers a particularly significant dialectical model for cultural interaction: an organic hybridity, which will tend towards fusion, in conflict with intentional hybridity, which enables a contestatory activity, a politicized setting of cultural differences against each other dialogically. Hybridity therefore, as a racial model, involves an antithetical movement of coalescence and antagonism, with the unconscious set against the intentional, the organic against the divisive, the generative against the undermining. (22)

Young further points out that "the crucial effect of hybridization" is "political," defined by "the moment where, within a single discourse, one voice is able to unmask the other" and "where authoritative discourse is undone" (22).

In Soyinka's *Lion*, language variance plays a metonymic role in signifying the anti-colonial abrogation of metropolitan English as the solely correct or superior version of the language. The playwright juxtaposes Nigerian figures of speech and words with Christian and European descriptions. While the language employed to convey this is English, there are essentially two versions of the language articulated in the play – one a mimicry of formal, British English while the other is a translation of Nigerian expressions in to the English language. Through this comparison and contrast, Soyinka demonstrates the differences between the two cultural expressions as well as the power dynamics underlying their relationship.

In the play, Lakunle, the schoolteacher, has just returned from Lagos and now attempts to appear and sound like the colonizer. He dons European-styled apparel and his speech mimics the language of the colonizer. He hopes to transform the rural,

traditional village of Ilujinle, where farming is still carried out manually and Western machines like the camera and motorcar are referred to as the "one-eyed box" and "devil-horse" respectively (*CP2* 12-13),⁵ into a town where modernity and progress are represented by the cars that will phase out the horses, the saucepans the claypots, and where cocktail parties and ballroom dancing are the symbols of high culture (*CP2* 34). Lakunle's dream of transforming Ilujinle and hopes of marrying Sidi are dashed by the village chief, Baroka, who has successfully maintained his position of power by isolating the village from outside ideas, bribing the developer to build the train tracks elsewhere and tricking Sidi into becoming his new wife.

Throughout the play, the exchange between Lakunle and the villagers reveals that the two are speaking in different wavelengths. Though the conversations employ the same language, there is a clear contrast of different perspectives in the voices. Although Ilujinle is Lakunle's hometown, he has returned completely transformed from his trip to Lagos and is now a caricature of a Westernized native in an ill-fitting suit. Sidi does not see him as a local anymore. She compares Lakunle to a foreigner and tells him that he looks, speaks and thinks like the photographer from Lagos (*CP2* 14). When the village belle taunts Lakunle and makes fun of his adopted ideas, he dismisses her ignorance with: "what is a jewel to pigs?" and "[a] prophet has honour except / In his own home" (*CP2* 5-6). These metaphors, appropriated from the Bible, are a stark contrast to Sidi's local figures of speech: "If the snail finds splinters in his shell / He changes house. Why do you stay?"; or when referring to Baroka, "See how the water glistens on my face / Like the dew-moistened leaves on a Harmattan morning / But he – his face is like a leather piece / Torn rudely from the saddle of his horse" (*CP2* 7, 22). Lakunle refers to Sidi as "[my] Ruth, my Rachel, Esther, Bathsheba" (*CP2* 19). She, on the other hand, does not recognize the significance of these Biblical references to the

qualities desired and expected of a good Christian wife and maintains that her name is "Sidi" (CP2 19).

As a result of their different wavelengths, Lakunle and Sidi tend to misunderstand each other in their attempts to communicate with one another. Lakunle is aware of Sidi's insistence on being presented a dowry before she agrees to marry him. He refuses to comply with the requirement, which he claims, commodifies the bride and relegates her to the status of a chattel. She, however, fails to see his purported rationale of being more egalitarian and respectful toward women. Instead, she assumes that his long explanation on equality between husband and wife is a cover for his miserly unwillingness to pay the bride price.

LAKUNLE. A savage custom, barbaric, out-dated,
Rejected, denounced, accursed,
Excommunicated, archaic, degrading,
Humiliating, unspeakable, unpalatable.

SIDI. Is the bag empty? Why did you stop?

LAKUNLE. I own only the Shorter Companion
Dictionary, but I have ordered
The Longer One – you wait! (CP2 8)

Here, Soyinka deliberately pokes fun at the extent to which the African, personified by Lakunle, is mimicking the string of adjectives commonly applied to the inferior, native subject by the colonizer who assumes he is more civilized. Lakunle speaks with an air of superiority over the village lass. Sidi, however, sees no value in this kind of European civilization:

LAKUNLE. Sidi, my love will open your mind
Like the chaste leaf in the morning, when
The sun first touches it.

SIDI. If you start that I will run away.

I had enough of that nonsense yesterday.

LAKUNLE. Nonsense? Nonsense? Do you hear?

Does anybody listen? Can the stones

Bear to listen to this? Do you call it

Nonsense that I poured the waters of my soul

To wash your feet? (*CP2 7*)

In this exchange, Lakunle's language sounds foreign and meaningless to Sidi: "You talk and talk and deafen me / With words which always sound the same / And make no meaning" (*CP2 8*). Toward the end of the play, Lakunle and Sidi speak of the wedding but each refers to a different one. Lakunle assumes it is their wedding she has prepared herself for and that the musicians and singers are there to celebrate their wedding. Sidi, on the other hand, assumes he knows she has decided to wed Baroka.

Therefore, although they are both speaking the same language, the cultural import underlying Lakunle's words is different from that of Sidi's. Resonant in the exchange between the two is the dialogic interaction between two different cultural identities and positions – one attempting to dominate while the other rejects this domination. The language variance articulated in the text becomes what Bakhtin describes as a site of contestation for meaning. The colonial presumption of authority and superiority in Lakunle's language is highlighted and satirized by Sidi's rejection and relegation of it to nonsensical utterances or meaningless talk, stripped of any semblance of power as she mocks him and his language with her local metaphors. Sidi's linguistic preference – a variation of the English language that foregrounds her Nigerian cultural identity – may be seen to represent the hybrid language that is the result of the interaction between the colonial ideology inherent in the metropolitan language and the

resistance to such imperialism by postcolonial writers and their appropriation of that language by re-inscribing upon it new meanings.

In the play, the "tongue" is a metaphor for a powerful linguistic tool used to persuade, cajole and trick. Sidi refers to Baroka's chief wife as "Sadiku of the honey tongue" who puts on her "wooing tongue" in her attempt to convince the Jewel of Ilujinle to marry the Bale (*CP2* 20). Lakunle, according to Sidi, has a lot in common with the photographer because they are both familiar with the urban society of Lagos. The schoolteacher, thus, will be able to "find sense" in the photographer's "clipping tongue" (*CP2* 17). However, the person with the most powerful tongue is none other than the Lion of Ilujinle himself. While Lakunle cites phrases from the Bible and mimics European culture, his language fails to impress the village folk, largely because he imitates with only a shallow comprehension of the ideals he proclaims. Baroka, however, is an old hand when it comes to knowing how to have his way. Thus, while the schoolteacher's words mean little to Sidi, the Bale's language has a strong effect on her. As intended by Baroka, his words entice, confuse and deceive her:

BAROKA. [...] Our thoughts fly crisply through the air

And meet, purified, as one.

And our first union

Is the making of this stamp.

The one redeeming grace on any paper tax

Shall be your face. And mine,

The soul behind it all, worshipful

Of nature for her gift of youth

And beauty to our earth. Does this

Please you, my daughter?

SIDI. I can no longer see the meaning, Baroka.

Now that you speak
 Almost like the school teacher, except
 Your words fly on a different path,
 I find [...] (CP2 48)

Baroka's images are perhaps as full of hyperbole as Lakunle's. However, the former presents them in an African perspective that contrasts with the schoolteacher's European ideals. Sidi's choice at the end of the play clearly demonstrates which one she prefers. Through Baroka's critique of the brand of progress or development that Lakunle proclaims, which promotes homogeneity in its design, the playwright points out the flaw – or colonial strategy – in European engineered development plans. As Baroka notes to Sidi: "But the skin of progress / Masks, unknown, the spotted wolf of sameness [...] / Does sameness not revolt your being, / My daughter?" (CP2 48). Although the images that Baroka employs in his language tend to reflect rural African setting, there are times when he shrewdly appropriates foreign metaphors to illustrate his point.

BAROKA. Yesterday's wine alone is strong and blooded, child,
 And though the Christians' holy book denies
 The truth of this, old wine thrives best
 Within a new bottle. The coarseness
 Is mellowed down, and the rugged wine
 Acquires a full and rounded body
 Is this not so – my child? (CP2 49)

Baroka rejects the Christian idea that old wine should not be placed in a new wineskin. He is proposing instead that the old and new can compliment each other, alluding to his union with young Sidi. Soyinka's appropriation of the Christian metaphor is noteworthy. Biblical images, in the colonial setting, represent an extension of the authority of the European colonizer. In the play, Baroka and Sidi's rejection and

appropriation of such images represent their rejection of the colonial authority that these images symbolize.

I would stress that Soyinka's use of the metropolitan language and reference to its culture, as illustrated by Baroka's appropriation of the Christian metaphor, is not exactly what Fanon describes as the Negro striving to assume whiteness (17-8). Inherent in the act and process of appropriation is the establishment of a new power dynamics between the colonizer and colonized. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin explain:

Whether written from monoglossic, diglossic, or polyglossic cultures, post-colonial writing abrogates the privileged centrality of 'English' by using language to signify difference while employing a sameness which allows it to be understood. It does this by employing language variance, the 'part' of a wider cultural whole, which assists in the work of language seizure whilst being neither transmuted nor overwhelmed by its adopted vehicle. (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989: 51).

The writers argue that language variance has a metonymic – specifically, synecdochic – function in postcolonial writing. Language variance creates the space where difference is articulated, explored and acknowledged, and where the contesting forces will generate a new meaning that transcends the boundaries of metropolitan English.

The writer 'function' meets the reader 'function' in the writing itself which dwells at the intersection of a vast array of cultural conditions. Such writing neither represents culture nor gives rise to a world-view, but sets the scene of a constitution of meaning. The strategies which such writing employs to maintain distance and otherness while appropriating the language are therefore a constant demonstration of the dynamic possibilities available to writing within the tension of 'centre' and 'margin.' (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989: 59)

Baroka's reference to and appropriation of the Christian metaphor of the incompatibility of old wine in new wineskin conveys at once the difference between European and African perspectives, and the legitimacy of the latter's voice.

Positioned between the metropolitan language and the native tongue is pidgin English, which represents the meeting and merging of two different languages. Though once viewed as a language inferior to metropolitan English, Spanish, French or Portuguese, the pidgin tongue has been accorded greater recognition and acceptance as a legitimate language in postcolonial studies. West Indian writers such as Wilson Harris, Derek Walcott and Edward Kamau Brathwaite have been noted for their deliberate insertion of Creole into their works. The conscious act of giving voice to what has been branded by the metropolitan center as an adulterated or pariah language becomes a process of being, of speaking and writing legitimacy into the outcast. W.H. New explains in his essay, "New Language, New World":

Literature which uses the actual language – the sound and syntax – of the people becomes, then, an arena in which the people's political and psychological tensions can find expression. The linguistic contrarities that are part of such 'actual language' both derive from and convey the tensions in the society. And the literary form that can sustain the verbal tensions becomes a means of celebrating, or exposing, or at least recognising and communicating particular social realities. (305-6)

In *Lion*, the exchange between Baroka and Lakunle after "the dance of the lost Traveller" demonstrates the clear difference and tension between the two languages.

BAROKA. Akowa. Teacher wa. Misita Lakunle.

[As the others take up the cry 'Misita Lakunle' he is forced to stop. He returns and bows deeply from the waist.]

LAKUNLE. A good morning to you sir.

BAROKA. Guru morin guru morin, ngh-hn! That is

All we get from 'alakowe'. You call at his house

Hoping he sends for beer, but all you get is

Guru morin. Will guru morin wet my throat?

Well, well our man of knowledge, I hope you have no

Query for an old man today. (CP2 16)

Baroka's "Misita Lakunle" and "Guru morin" are a parody of Lakunle's speech. In other parts of the play, the Bale seems to have no difficulty saying "Mister Lakunle" (CP2 17). Thus, Baroka is deliberately poking fun at the schoolteacher's air of 'proper' enunciation, and in the larger picture, his adopted language and cultural position. Underlying the mockery is the intent to undermine Lakunle's position, and the colonial center that he mimics.

Another prominent feature in postcolonial writing that demonstrates this tension and interaction between the metropolitan center and the margin is the deliberate move to leave some native words or phrases untranslated. Throughout *Lion*, there are numerous occasions when Soyinka employs Yoruba words but does not include an immediate translation after these words. The inclusion of the native tongue in the English text creates a sense of cultural authenticity but this aesthetic aspect also has a more profound political dimension to it.

The technique of selective lexical fidelity which leaves some words untranslated in the text is a more widely used device for conveying the sense of cultural distinctiveness. Such a device not only acts to signify the difference between cultures, but also illustrates the importance of discourse in interpreting cultural concepts. [...]

[.... It] also forces the reader into an active engagement with the

horizons of the culture in which these terms have meaning. The reader gets some idea about the meaning of these words from the subsequent conversation, but further understanding will require the reader's own expansion of the cultural situation beyond the text. (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989: 64-5)

The writers also point out that the strategy of inserting cultural difference through untranslated text and the very deliberate act of not translating immediately the non-English words into the metropolitan language is "a political act" – "while translation is not inadmissible in itself, glossing gives the translated word, and thus the 'receptor' culture, the higher status" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989: 66).

In *Lion*, Baroka is referred to as the "Bale" at times and the "Chief" at others. Soyinka chooses not to provide an immediate translation of "Bale" in parenthesis. No translations are offered for other terms of reverence such as "Kabiyesi" and "Baba" with which the villagers prostrate and greet Baroka, nor for the "agbada", the local robe that he dons (CP2 18). In the dance reenacting the arrival of the photographer from Lagos, the villagers haul him to the town center, in front of the "odan" tree (CP2 16). While many of these Yoruba words are used in a self-explanatory context and readers could probably guess their meaning, the absence of a translation is none the less a significant strategy in articulating and establishing the legitimacy of the African voice that is inserting a defiant rupture in the English text. Meanwhile, the songs in the play are translated into English, but as endnotes instead of a gloss. Although the use of accompanying explanations such as endnotes and footnotes has a practical function – the translation runs on for a few lines and would make an unwieldy chunk in parenthesis – I would stress that it is also another important and symbolic representation of the dialogic process between the colonizer and colonized. The use of endnotes in the play creates a wider visual distance between the Yoruba and English texts. Interestingly, the Yoruba words and phrases are mentioned first while their translation in the metropolitan

language has been relegated to the end of the play. This rupture in the language flow is another metaphor for the cultural difference and tension between the two. The visual and textual space on the pages separating the different languages and their underlying cultural identities and ideologies represents the liminal space where the differences interact. In the play, this process is seen in the exchange between Lakunle and the villagers, which is articulated in the very text between the untranslated phrases and the endnotes.

In another play, *The Road*, the contrast between 'correct' English according to British standards and the different variations of the language, from pidgin English to a mimicry of Hollywood ghetto talk, is perhaps the most prominent feature that strikes the reader. The play explores the quest of Professor, a lay preacher who fell out with the bishop of the local church as a result of doctrinal differences and, probably, the former's mismanagement of funds. Professor, a "tall figure in Victorian outfit—tails, top hat" (*CPI* 156),⁶ now makes a living by selling vehicle parts salvaged from road accidents and forging driving licences and other documents. He is obsessed with one goal: to discover the mystery of death in the hope that by grasping this elusive knowledge, he would be able to "cheat fear by foreknowledge" (*CPI* 227). The setting and rituals in the play illustrate this quest to comprehend and have control over the mystery of life and death. The Professor lives in the graveyard near the church he was excommunicated from, and a stone's throw down the road are the layabouts who are lorry touts, drivers, and vagabonds. Two of them help run his "AKSIDENT STORE" where the looted vehicle parts are sold. After the death of Sergeant Burma, Kotonu has been appointed to operate the store. A former lorry driver, he gave up driving after accidentally knocking down the masked egungun celebrant who was at the moment of the accident possessed by Ogun during the Driver's Festival. Kotonu, fearing he would be mobbed if the worshippers in the festival were to find out what had happened to their mask-bearer,

puts on the mask himself and plays the role. Meanwhile, Professor chances upon the injured celebrant, Murano, and nurses him back to a state of mute consciousness and makes the him his palm-wine tapper.

The ending of the play suggests that Ogun is angered by the disruption to his festival and thus chooses to claim a human life instead of accepting the traditional sacrifice of a dog. Professor pays the price for his venal crimes and perhaps more significantly, for – in his warped quest to conquer death – keeping Murano, the original mask-bearer, in a state of limbo between the worlds of the living and the dead. Though alive, Murano is a zombie who does Professor's bidding, or as Derek Wright puts it in *Wole Soyinka Revisited*, whose spirit is trapped "in transition between life and death" (89). The usual communion that Professor holds in the evening turns ugly when he decides to enact instead an egungun ritual. Confusion sets in as the possession begins and in the ensuing scuffle, he is stabbed by the thug, Say Tokyo Kid, and Ogun claims the sacrifice he wants – Professor.

Throughout the play, Professor is obsessed with his quest for the "Word". Ironically, the path that he takes to seek this truth – the essence of death – is a departure from the Christian doctrine from which the term is derived. There is an obvious link between the Word in the play to the figure of Christ, who is also described as the Word in the Bible and as the path to humankind's salvation. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"; "The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1, 14). However, since his excommunication from the church, the Professor has begun to look toward the egungun ritual for answers. The decision to choose what is according to Christian view a pagan practice may be deemed an outright rejection of the Christian authority in the Word and

the white missionary movement that brought the religion to Nigeria during the colonial period.

Soyinka goes a step further in this exercise of abrogation by retaining the Christian term but relegating it to the useless scraps of paper that Professor collects and by associating it with his deluded philosophizing.⁷ When he tells Samson and Kotonu to seek first the Word, Samson points out that it matters little to the driver and tout: "The Word? Will that fill his belly or mine?" (*CPI* 188). The appropriation of the Christian Word as the authoritative symbol of colonial power introduces into the relationship between the metropolitan center and the postcolonial subject the subversive voice of the latter. As Homi K. Bhabha explains in "Signs Taken for Wonders,"⁸ the "English book" is "an insignia of colonial authority and a signifier of colonial desire and discipline" (102). In the account of Anund Messeh's encounter in Delhi with the local community's excitement with the discovery of the Bible, the latter is only willing to partially embrace what the Christian Word teaches. The new converts reject the idea that the Bible is the religion of the "European Sahibs" because, they claim, the sahibs eat meat. At the same time, they would concede to take the Sacrament if the entire country decided to receive it (Bhabha 102-4). The new converts are redefining the rules of the European Word. As Bhabha puts it, "When they make these intercultural, hybrid demands, the natives are both challenging the boundaries of discourse and subtly changing its terms by setting up another specifically colonial space [for] the negotiations of cultural authority" (119). In *The Road*, the misguided Professor appropriates the European Word by redefining the notion of salvation and the way to attain it. Soyinka takes this subversive negotiation further by introducing into it the egungun festival – a pagan practice by Christian standards – and replacing the figure of Christ with the Yoruba deity, Ogun. The Word, as an insignia of authority and cultural identity, that triumphs at the end of the play is

the unwritten doctrine of Yoruba metaphysics, and not the Christian Word proclaimed by European colonialism.

Soyinka articulates his rejection of Christianity through the play's parody of the Bible and Christian practices. This rejection is a reflection of Soyinka's own position in leaving the Christian faith that he grew up with to be immersed in Yoruba mythology as he explored indigenous rituals and belief in his mid-twenties.⁹ In the game of pretend in the play, Salubi acts as the corrupt official who goes to "Samson de millionaire" and presents his supplication: "Give us this day our daily bribe. Amen" (*CPI* 155). The Christian prayer is blasphemously rephrased to ask for a daily providence of bribes rather than bread. The three victims of an accident that occurred in the same morning the play begins are, according to Professor, "crucified on rigid branches" (*CPI* 159). The image is appropriated from the Biblical account of the three men – one of whom is Christ – who are crucified (Matthew 27). Part of the wall around the churchyard crumbled after the layabouts in the area sat on it to watch the duel between Professor and the bishop. As the spectators outside got more and more excited, they began to *jump on it, thus causing its downfall*. The incident is referred to as "the wall of Jericho" (*CPI* 163-4), which symbolizes a victorious breakthrough for the children of Israel in the Bible (Joshua 5: 13-6, 27). In the play, however, the church wall crumbled under the weight of the rowdy pagans as they cheered the wayward Professor's victory in outwitting the bishop's ploy. The final blasphemy against Christianity is found at the end of the play when the evening communion that begins with the sound of the organ coming from the church nearby is transformed into a murderous egungun festival when the god Ogun possesses Murano and claims Professor as his sacrifice. The Christian communion with God through the partaking of the symbolic blood of Christ becomes a pagan ritual where it is Ogun who claims the blood of Professor. The libation in the African version of the communion is the intoxicating palm wine, which prepares

Murano for the "agemo," a "passage of transition from the human to the divine essence" when he is possessed by Ogun (*CPI* 149).

D.S. Izevbaye, in *Critical Perspectives on Wole Soyinka*, observes that *The Road* is itself a "dramatization of the limits of language" (91). The difference and rivalry between the two orders of faith are also demonstrated by the verbose Professor and the mute Murano. The former, a wayward Christian, orders the layabouts around and speaks in a convoluted manner about the mysterious Word that he seeks. Yet his words, though sounding profound and learned, leave us with little certainty as to what exactly the Word is. At one stage, Professor describes its as the ethereal essence of death that is to be found where there is death, thus the impression that the Word is the essence of death (*CPI* 159). Professor, however, is a passive observer of the metaphysical knowledge that he seeks compared to Murano, who in his prolonged and apparently dumb silence is able to actively experience, twice, the essence of death when he is possessed by Ogun. As Wright observes:

Misled by a too hastily and ill-digested Victorianized Christianity that he has never fully renounced, and specifically by its emphasis on the verbal incarnation of divine revelation, Professor is unable to understand the essentials of indigenous religious practice: for example, the nonverbal medium of egungun ritual, and the mysterious, indeterminate power of the Yoruba Ashe (unwritten Word), which, because of its dynamic, priestly power for annunciation and imprecation, has the effective status of a deed and is not to be found in the debris of abandoned print where Professor searches for it. Most important, he is hampered by an obsessive Christian typology and divisive eschatology that have caused him to lose touch with the complex interflow of life and death in the Yoruba worldview. (92)

Compared to its Christian counterpart, the Yoruba Word has no written text and is expressed and experienced through the very performance of and participation in the ritual, by putting on the sacred egungun mask and being possessed by Ogun. As Wright observes: "Professor's deranged rant about 'the Word' is so much noisy, meaningless verbiage, beside which Murano's profound silence is pregnant with revelation" (94-5).

What is also clearly articulated in the play is the range of variations to the English language as a result of the Nigerian appropriation of the language. The store selling vehicle parts looted from accident sites is given a name in broken English: the "AKSIDENT STORE-ALL PART AVAILEBUL" (*CPI* 151). When Samson asks Salubi, "Who lend you uniform," the latter replies, "I take uniform impress all employer" (*CPI* 152). Salubi declares in his blood-stained uniform that he is fit to be the chauffeur of the Queen of England (*CPI* 153). The pidgin English that Salubi and other characters in the junkyard speak – "Na common jealousy dey do you. I know I no get job, but I get uniform" (*CPI* 152) – demonstrates the local vernacular that results from the informal mixing and merging of both Yoruba and English languages. Within Samson's "God almighty. You dey like monkey wey stoway inside sailor suit" (*CPI* 152) is another form of language variance. Immediately after the sacrilegious imprecation "God Almighty," he switches into pidgin English. When Samson says he wished Professor would return in time to see Say Tokyo Kid high on hemp and messing up the place, the thug spits and declares, in American gangster lingo: "That's what would happen if your Professor came in. I don give a damn for that crazy and he know it. He's an awright guy but he sure act crazy sometimes and I'm telling you, one of these days, he's gonna go too far" (*CPI* 171).

Untranslated words such as Murano's "osuka" (*CPI* 151) and translations provided in footnotes are common features in *The Road*. To understand the meaning of phrases such as "Politics no get dramatic pass am" – "Politics are not half as dramatic"

(CPI 164) – and "Ogiri mouth" – "Skunk mouth" (CPI 165) – readers would have to refer to the explanation provided at the bottom of the page. At the end of the play is an entire "Glossary of Pidgin Words" and a translation of Yoruba songs (CPI 230). The use of Yoruba words and pidgin English by the community of drivers and touts lends greater authenticity to the African play. It also demonstrates the process of change that the metropolitan language has gone through in Nigerian society. Metropolitan English has been disrupted, re-inscribed with a different syntax and mingled with the local vernacular by the drivers. Pidgin English also reveals the class difference between those educated in British English and those who are not. Professor represents the former while the driver and touts represent the latter. Their conversation thus provides a glimpse of the social and economic hierarchy that is a legacy of the colonial master-native subject relationship. In modern-day Nigeria, this class hierarchy remains through various means, such as the disparity in opportunities to formal education. The language variance in the characters' conversation demonstrates the social and economic dialogic taking place within postcolonial African society and underscores the notion that the negotiation of cultural identity is a process that is continuous and has no specific cut-off stage.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that the presence of multiple voices in the language articulated in *The Road* and *Lion* signifies the hybridity that is emerging from Nigeria's colonial experience. In *The Road*, the Word as a term denoting the Bible and as a symbol of Christ and the path to salvation, is no longer the exclusive domain of the Christian church and its followers. The boundaries of exclusivity have been transgressed by Professor, who inscribes in the Word a different and – by Christian standards – pagan truth in his quest for an ill-defined essence of death. This suggests a rejection of the colonial authority and experience that is linked to the Christian Word propagated by white missionaries in Nigeria. More interestingly, it is neither the Christian Word nor Professor's wayward quest that triumphs at the end of the play but Ogun, the Yoruba

deity, who through his creativity forged a way through the dark passage between the gods and humans.¹⁰ In other words, the play rejects the Word, be it the Christian doctrine or Professor's papers, in favor of the Yoruba worship of Ogun, that is not based on any written word but on the experiential performance of the worship ritual.

In *Lion*, all three main characters fail to display any convincing sense of progressive change. Lakunle remains the haughty native who is bent on imitating the British ruler and on restructuring the local community to reflect the colonizer's standards of taste and values. Baroka and Sidi learn to be selective, adopting some modern practices introduced by the people from the city while largely maintaining their traditional rural practices. Their ultimate goal is to ensure that their position of power in the village is not jeopardized but enhanced. The play, thus, takes side with neither the colonizer's brand of modernity nor native African's traditions. Instead, it exposes the contestation for power between the two and shows how some local folk like Lakunle would readily adopt lock, stock and barrel the gamut of European ideals while others like Baroka and Sidi would concede to minimal changes, and only those that would serve their interests.

It is in Soyinka's description of all this, through his appropriation of the English language, and of European and Christian metaphors, that we see the process of empowering the colonial/postcolonial subject taking place. The voice of the African, often marginalized from the British center, is given agency and contrasted to the metropolitan language itself. The two plays are written in an English that is a hybrid construction, which contains within it the tension and contestation between multiple voices. The African voice seeks to undermine the authority of the British voice by abrogating the privilege tagged to the metropolitan language and by appropriating it not only to articulate that rejection or rebellion but more importantly, to establish the subject's empowered social and political position. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin

point out, this process "establishes a medium which fractures the concept of a standard language and installs the 'marginal' variations as the actual network of a particular language" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1995: 284). In *Lion*, the colonial status of the metropolitan language is challenged by the African subject, and disrupted by untranslated Yoruba terms. Instead of taking the position espoused by Ngugi, who chose to stop writing in English altogether, Soyinka concurs with his West Indian brothers who maintain that the process of abrogating and appropriating the metropolitan language is intrinsic in the larger goal of de-centering and de-colonizing colonial culture and hegemony.